

The tragedy of the Gathorne Hill

Brothers in WW1

Richard : Compton Martin's own pioneer "Biggles"

At 10am on Wednesday, 12 August 1918, three months before the end of the first World War five Sopworth Camel biplanes left a tiny airfield near Dunkirk on a patrol along the French/ Belgium coast. The lead pilot, 21 year- old Lieutenant Richard Alexander Gathorne Hill, from Hazel Manor, Compton Martin was never seen again. Compton Martin Village Hall was built in his memory and will be 100 years old on 7 September 2023. His mother Gertrude gave £17 (worth £1,000 today) to build the hall, which commemorates Richard and other men from the village killed during the War. Today a painting of Richard is inside the hall.

Richard was born on 24 May 1897 at Poole Court, Yate to a wealthy Bristol shipbuilding family. The house, an elegant mid-19th century mansion and family home, was built in the middle of green fields. Today, it is in the heart of Yate, and used as the council offices. In 1891 there were 19 family and servants living in Poole Court and the adjoining stables. Yate was then a small village of people.

Richard's father Charles, born in 1857, had acquired and re-named the shipbuilding company Charles Hill and Sons based in Bristol's docks. He married Gertrude Isabella Jones- Mortimore and was a Justice of the Peace. His company was thriving and in 1879 had opened the Bristol City Line between Bristol and New York.

Richards's brothers were Charles six years older, Hugh Maurice four years older and sisters Favell and Dilys. Favell became Lady Miles and an author.

Part of Poole Court was used by the Royal Flying Corps (RFC) as offices and an officers mess. As a boy, Richard might at some time have been influenced by the RFC officers with their "thrill of flying" stories. The Hill family then shared homes in Hazel Manor, Compton Martin and in the magnificent Claverton Manor, Bath, now the home of the American Museum. Claverton Manor was owned by the Skrine family but the Hills retained staff at houses in Compton Martin and Bath .

As Richard grew up he would realise that Bristol was becoming dominant in the design and building of aircraft. There were major facilities set up by the RFC for the repair of aircraft at the nearby grass airfield at Yate.

Hazel Manor

The Manor House, Compton Martin a country retreat, was not nearly as large as Claverton Manor but the 7,572 acre estate, extending across the Mendips, was popular for hunting. The house had been improved by the Ennor family, Cornish mining engineers who came to the Mendips in the 19th century to rework the old lead wastes. It was built in a magnificent position on the northern slopes of the Mendips, south of Bristol. The Hills came in the summer and autumn months for the shooting parties. There was practically no view as the house was set back from the exposed northern escarpment. To see the panorama, Richard and his family would have to take a short shrub-lined walk to a field. Below lay the newly-opened Yeo reservoir (now called Blagdon Lake) and Dundry Hill, which hid the city of Bristol. To the west across the River Severn were the Welsh mountains and to the east where the Chew Valley Lake now is, was rich pastoral country. Beyond Landsdown Ridge you could see the upper terraces of Bath and on a good day the Westbury White Horse, Wiltshire. Hazel Manor was burnt to the ground in March 1929.

Durnford School

From the ages of 9 to 13, Richard was educated at Durnford School, a spartan prep school in the high street of Langton Matravers on the Isle of Purbeck near Swanage, Dorset.

Many wealthy parents paid to send their boys to this school. It would have been a culture shock to the young lad, who was used to having a German governess and servants at home. Richard also must have disliked the regime of headmaster Thomas Pellatt. Pellatt insisted every morning of the of “strip and swim ritual on “Dancing Ledge” a natural ledge of Purbeck stone. The boys would run to the coast then scramble down to a natural shelf above the sea, where Pellat had created a swimming pool by getting quarrymen to blast into the flat rock. Today the Ledge is a popular tourist attraction and used by “tombstoners”.

James Bond author, Ian Fleming eleven years younger than Richard, also went to Durnford School, Eton and Sandhurst. At Durnford , aged seven he sent a letter to his mother when suffering from a cough: “Don’t tell Mr Pelatt cause just this morning he said that nun of us had coffs. I am afraid that I do not like school very much.” Fleming later said that “the school epitomised the strange British faith in bad food, plenty of Latin and beatings from an early age”.

Pellat was known as TP by staff and boys alike with the boys always addressed by their Christian names. His sanitised 174 - page autobiography doesn’t mention corporal punishment at all or the morning swim ritual. His questionable claim was that he “wrote long letters at regular intervals” to the parents: “Think of seventy or eighty letters of as much of six or often ten sides of large notepaper” But Richard might have enjoyed listening to Mrs Pelatt when she read to the boys from popular fiction. The school described Richard as “ shy, reserved and expressed himself with difficulty. “Pellatt was a great supporter of the Eton educational system and would have prepared Richard for his entrance examination. Three quarters of Durnford boys went to Eton.

Eton College

For five years from September 1910 Richard, aged 13 attended Eton. He would be impressed with the new school hall and library finished two years earlier. Among the 1,000 boys there and born the same year as Richard was future Prime Minister Anthony Eden.

At the end of every term, Charles and Gertrude would receive reports from each master covering his attainments, character and future prospects. He thrived and matured and his greater self-assurance was due to tutor C. O. Bevan and housemaster A. A. Somerville. A contemporary said: “None gave

better proof than Dick Hill of the truth of the saying, “the oak tree cometh out at last. He was shy and though this might seem to imply there was nothing in him. This was far from the case. His school contemporaries with the unerring instinct of boys rightly credited him with no small share of grit and determination and as he passed from private to public school he steadily developed with the result that when his time came to show his mettle in the War, he was well fitted for the task. He had a real genius of the special work which falls to the lot of an airman and a splendid nerve which danger could not shake, together with just those qualities which makes for leadership. To him difficulties called not for discussion but for action and although the exact circumstances in which he met his death will never be cleared up (they are now!), this is at least is certain that he met it like the typical Englishman that he was.”

When he was at home during the holidays Richard might have taken part in horse riding and hunting that was very popular with his family.

Richard’s brother Charles was married in St Michael’s, Compton Martin. After the death of his father in 1934 Charles took over responsibility for running the family shipping business. After Cambridge to gain experience of shipping he went on a world tour in ships of all types. He lived in Eastwood Manor, East Harptree.

Richards sister, Favell, was also married in Compton Martin where flags were flown throughout the village. One placard said “Zummerzit folks wishee joy today and always”.

In September 1914, Richard received news that brother Maurice was missing, presumed dead in France during the War, which must have had a dramatic effect on him as he would have been near to joining up himself.

Army

He left Eton in July 1915 and after a brief period at Sandhurst, gained a commission in January 1916 as sub lieutenant in the 2nd Battalion Princess Alberts Somerset Light Infantry. No doubt his brother-in-law, career soldier Charles Miles (he would become Lieutenant Colonel Sir Charles W. Miles Bart,) in the Somerset Light Infantry suggested this was the best regiment to join.

It was not that unusual for potential officers to apply for commissions in both the army and the navy and there would have been a shortage of pilots. He joined the navy (Royal Navy Air Service) in October 1916 where he would receive an intensive course in flight basics, weather patterns, navigation by the stars and Morse Code.

Navy

In May 1917, Richard transferred to No 4 Squadron as a Flight Sub Lieutenant Naval Wing, RNAS. He was at the vanguard of British aviation history. When he was born there were no aeroplanes and the first recognised powered flight in Britain was not made until he was 11 years old. As a lad he could have watched early planes at Yate Airfield close to his home and now he was learning to fly on an Avro biplane.

At this time pilots were used for reconnaissance and not for offensive operations. They never carried parachutes.

No 4 Squadron were reformed in December 1916 at Coudekerque, just outside Dunkirk and remained there until April 1917 for reconnaissance and occasional bombing raids. The squadron then were re-equipped with Sopworth Pups planes before moving to Bray-Dunes on the French side of the border. In a coastal role they were used for daylight bombing and then switched to German occupied Belgium ports targeting railway and airfields.

Richard had trained at Cranwell on the new Sopworth Camel planes just a few months after the first one was built. Cranwell was then just a large farmers field with a couple of buildings. The single-seater biplane would prove to be the most successful British fighter. It was called a Camel because of the hump-shaped metal faring over the gun breeches to stop them freezing at high altitudes. The two machine guns on the front of the cockpit were synchronised to fire through the propeller. Richard and other pilots would find it very difficult to fly at first because it was susceptible to spins but to an experienced pilot it had unmatched manoeuvrability.

Almost all of the Camel's weight - the engine, armaments, fuel, cockpit and pilot were placed in a seven foot section, which made it hard to handle. It also had sensitive controls. Pilot training was poor and there were fatalities among

the new pilots. 385 pilots died during non-combat in WW1 and 413 pilots died in combat. The life expectancy of a pilot was a little more than two weeks.

RAF

Probationary Flight Officer Richard received his certificate to fly the Camel on 6 April 1917. At this time No 4 squadron RNAS became No 204 squadron when the RFC and RNAS merged to become the RAF and he was made a full Lieutenant.

204 Squadron were the first to receive Camels in June 1917 and began the role of a fighter squadron, flying escort to bombers and carrying out offensive operations along the coast. Combat would have been new to Richard.

Camels were flown in fiction by "Biggles" the popular boys books by Captain W. E. Johns. One of the 100 odd Biggles titles is called Pioneer Air fighter. Biggles flew a Camel and Richard was certainly a "pioneer" flier in the most famous fighter of WW1.

In January 1918, the squadron made a temporary move to Walmer in Kent for rest and refit. The airfield was a flat grassy plateau, which had been requisitioned to help with the defence of shipping in the Channel. From Walmer Richard was able to hear the sound of guns on the Western Front.

February 1918 was bitterly cold. Aircraft were open to elements and cold winds would pierce the thick fabric of Richards's leather suit and blow down his neck so a silk scarf plugged the gaps and kept his body warm. Standard uniform was soft leather goggles, leather helmet and long leather coat.

The squadron then returned to Bray-Dunes on the French side of the Franco-Belgium border near the Fueness Canal in March then settled at Teteghem in May 1918. Teteghem airfield was near Wormhout and Dunkirk, Nor-Pas-de Calais.

On 30 May 1918 at Calais, Richard was wounded in the mouth and base of the skull by a shell and became seriously ill. This was a similar injury to what his brother Maurice received four years earlier. His record shows that he was still very ill during early June. He recovered sufficiently to return home on leave later in the month to recover and possibly celebrate a belated 21st birthday

with his family. Returning to the battlefield after being seriously ill shows the bravery of the once “shy boy” A few weeks later he was dead.

From early April 1918 and the Battle of Amien the allies had control of the Western Front. they had broken through with the Germans retreating back to the Hindleburg Line. But the war in the air continued and Richard returned to flying.

Richard’s Camel No D 6624 had previously been used by Captain James Enstone DSC, DFC a flying ace credited with 15 aerial victories. During the War 204 squadron produced 19 “aces.” His plane didn’t prove to be lucky but Richard was now a very experienced pilot, but had he fully recovered from his injury? He had flown nine different aircraft: Maurice Farman, Curtis, Auro, BE2C, Bristol Scout, Nieuport, Sopworth Two Seater, Sopworth Single Seater, and Sopworth Camel and against all the odds had survived. Many pilots were pessimistic about surviving the war when so many of their colleagues were being killed. The motto of the squadron was ““Through adversity to the stars.”

On 12 August, Richard left the airfield leading a patrol of five Camels along the coast near Ostend. His plane was seen to fall into the sea in flames by a civilian witness. One of Richards fellow pilots was 20 year- old Canadian Lieutenant Salter Charles Askin from Windsor, Ontario, who had just transferred to the RAF and 204 from the Canadian army.

Askin’s notebook records:

“12 August about 11 o clock in the morning a formation of five of us ran into about eight Foker biplanes. Hill got away from the rest and I tried to help him out. Hill was shot down and out of control ,which left me alone with three Bosch. After a short engagement my engine was damaged and bullets pierced my petrol tank and shot fine adjustment (engine valve) out of hand. Result. I had to land in the sea about three miles of West End, Belgium”.

Askin was made a prisoner of war. German aviation historian Gunnar Soderbaum said: “I personally believe that Askin and Hill from 204 were brought down by a formation from Seefrosta, at this stage a complete one seater unit”.

Seefrosta were a crack German aviation unit. They flew fighters and reconnaissance aircraft in support of their navy and were a seaward extension of the trench line.

ORBIT KAHLER

The German Batterie Zeppelin verified both incidents and were officially confirmed by the Germans (Marineflafchef). Obit Kahler reported that the Camel came down in flames and that he had brought down Hill. The location of Kahler's victory was said to be in the sea outside Wenduyn. Another RAF report said that "his plane fell into sea off Ostend piers". So it is possible that after he was hit, Richard was able to steer the plane north east a short way along the coast before it crashed into the sea near the entrance to the German held port of Ostend. German pilots Spiers and Tyhrone both claimed Askin's Camel but it was Spies that had his victory confirmed.

Another enemy report said: "Between 11am and 12 noon a patrol of five one seaters made a patrol in the sea area. At 11 29 am Obit Kahler shot down a Sopworth and another Sopworth was shot down by Lt Spiers at 11 40 am".

The German propaganda paper "Gazette Des Ardennes" was distributed to French soldiers by German planes. On the same day that the two Camels were shot down the 12 August issue of the paper said: "Brought down by Midlekerke. Lieutenant R. A. G. Hill killed by Raverzyde. Lieutenant Askin wounded". These names must have been given to them by Askin himself, now a prisoner of war. How else would the enemy have known the names of the downed pilots? The coastal villages of Midlekerke and Raverzyde are today close to Raverzyde park and open air museum along the sand dunes commemorating both World Wars.

The air warfare continued and the day after Richards's death Camels, from his squadron attacked an enemy airfield near Wormhout.

In a fictional biography on Biggles he also went missing over the sea but during WW2.

When Richard was reported "missing" a telegram was sent to his father on 13 August. The Hill family must have hoped it would be a repeat of brother Maurice's situation when he came back after being reported missing. After just spending some time with Richard on leave and the war coming to an end they

must have hoped he would survive. But it was not to be and somewhere in the English Channel just off Ostend are the remains of Camel D6624 and Richard Hill. Of the 1,413 pilots who died in combat in World War One, Richard had the distinction of serving in all three services.

Gertrude would apply for Richard's Victory Medal and British War Medal. Richard left £2,065 18s 3d.

Memorials

There are innumerable memorials to Richard : Gertrude and Charles Hill were determined he would not be forgotten. These are at:

Compton Martin

Inside the village hall is a wooden plaque and a framed water colour portrait of Richard , seated on a pile of ropes and wearing his navy uniform with the English Channel that ended his life in the background.

Five years after Richard was killed, Compton Martin Village Hall was officially opened on Friday, 7 September 1923 by Gertrude assisted by Rev Maxwell Fisher, the Compton Martin rector. It was far from a solemn occasion as, after a sketch given by the Women's Institute, there was music and refreshments and everyone sang Aud Lang Syne.

Gertrude had given £17 (worth £1,000 today) towards the building of the new hall, which must have been just for land purchase. The site was previously a spinney. A local paper described it as a "beautiful gift to the parish". In the 1920s, new village halls were being built all over Somerset thanks to interest free loans arranged by the Somerset Rural Community Council.

A memorial plaque, a painting of Richard and a picture of Gertrude did not come to the village hall until 1981 when they were donated by John Charles Hill. Gertrude must have commissioned the painting from Australian - born Bath artist Sarah Elizabeth Roberts (Etty) Horton, (1862 -1959) for display it in her Claverton Manor home and it remained there for 60 years.

From April 1918 when the RAF was formed, pilots wore white shirts, black ties and black boots or shoes, which Richard is wearing in the painting. So it seems

that the painting was made after his death based on a photograph. Significantly the English Channel is in the background. Victoria Gallery, Bath has 13 of Ettie Horton's watercolours including "Physical therapy at Bath War Hospital" painted by her in 1918 showing convalescing soldiers using gym equipment.

A plaque on the south wall of St Michaels Church, Compton Martin has ten names of men from the village who had been killed. The dedication and plaque unveiling was on Armistice Day 1922 by the Archdeacon of Bath. There was a muffled peal of the six bells in the church and the large congregation included many ex- servicemen.

Walmer, Kent

Richard's name with 15 others is on a war memorial in memory of the men who died that had been based at the aerodrome in 1917 and 1918.

Charterhouse

A stained glass window to those who gave their lives is in St Hugh's Church

Chipping Sodbury/ Yate

Richard's name is on a plaque on the lych gate of St Marys Church, Yate and on a stained glass window in the church.

District War Memorial Cottage Hospital. A large wooden memorial plaque with the names of local men that died in the War was displayed in the main hall. The name of R. Hill is almost lost among the 326 other names. The plaque is headed "Read not these names in sorrow but with pride and may you live as nobly as they died". In 2011 the plaque was moved to Yate District Heritage Centre, Poole Court for display. This was very appropriate as Poole Court was the family home of Hill family and where Richard spent his early years. The

Heritage Centre (and the plaque) are now in a barn at the White Hart Hotel in Church Lane, Yate.

Arras, Pas-de Calais, France

Flying Services War Commonwealth War Graves memorial, Faubourg d'Amiens cemetery

Ubley

War memorial in churchyard of St Bartholomew's church

Claverton

St Marys Church

Eton College

Name on War Memorial Colonnade

Langton Matravers, Dorset

Durnford School WW1 memorial in St Georges Church.

Richard's name is among the 53 names of boys from the school who died in the War.

Maurice: "Back from the dead"

The experiences of Richard's brother Hugh, always known by his second name of Maurice, shows that life could be extremely hard even for those men that survived the War. Maurice (born 1893) was four years older than Richard and had an entirely different personality: an extravert, with lots of friends and a great love of horses, Richard with his retiring nature must have greatly admired "everybody's friend". Maurice went to Chipping Sodbury School and

Harrow. As a boy he would have seen Yate grass airfield being built close from his Poole Court home.

Testimonials said :

“He was one of the most popular people in the Beaufort Hunt country in 1914. He possessed a most charming personality, an infectious gaiety and an irresistible joie de vivre - he radiated sunshine. Horses and hunting he loved and went very well with hounds bringing to his favourite sport a characteristic enthusiasm”.

“He seemed to do all things well and was yet utterly unspoilt and modest so everyone loved him and his influence was also happy”

“As cheerfulness and patience never failed him and he found much happiness in life”. For all that, his story is one of the deep tragedies of the war”. Maurice might have first joined the local hunt which met at the White Lion Hotel. Horses were stabled in a barn now the home of Yate Heritage Centre.

Maurice then hunted regularly with the Beauford Hunt before he joined up early in 1914 and was so keen probably gathered three days a week at the Portcullis Hotel in Horse Street and hunted all day, exhausting horses, riders and hounds alike. Christmas Day was very special when huge crowds turned out to support them. It is strange to think today that the Beauford Hunt even hunted otters! His parents had been members of the Hunt since 1889 and attended the Hunt balls..

Mary Pelly

Maurice's girlfriend, Mary Evelyn, the daughter Sir Harold Pelly, Baronet and Lady Pelly from Gillingham, Dorset was also a keen horsewoman and member of the Dorset Hunt. An “English rose”, who was fond of sport also ran the local girl guides and brownies groups. She hunted locally but in addition foxhounds were kept in kennels at Priddy, near Hazel Manor where there was pheasant, partridge and rabbit shooting on the estate.

British Expeditionary Force

In 1914 Maurice took a commission in the 5th Dragoon Guards, a cavalry regiment and was made 2nd Lieutenant. The Gathorne Hills were also closely involved with the North Somerset Yeomanry, a part-time regiment of the British Army with brother Charles a captain for many years. After training with the Dragoons, Maurice was stationed at Aldershot. He left the barracks on 15 August and arrived at Le Havre where he stayed for two days.

A few days earlier, Lady Pelly, President of the Shaftesbury Division of the Red Cross Society threw open her home, Thornwood House, to a major voluntary aid detachment exercise. The house was set up as a hospital for casualties from the war. Almost certainly Mary would have taken part in this exercise.

The Dragoon Guards, about 500 strong, were in three squadrons and part of the First Cavalry Brigade in the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). During this early stage in The War the cavalry was used for reconnaissance, guarding the BEF flanks and rear and charging enemy formations.

Like so many others Maurice would have been very optimistic about the outcome. "Home by Christmas" and all that. Many aristocratic or public school educated young men regarded signing up as an adventure. Maurice, loved nothing more than hunting with horses so naturally joined a cavalry regiment and was given his own horse. War would be fun!. He could still ride his horse, play a bit of polo and kill a few Bosch in the process. Britain declared war on Germany early in August so Maurice was one of the earliest soldiers training for the BEF. His role would be scouting and gathering information about the enemy and, in battle was expected to charge and break up enemy formations. But the emphasis was changing to dismounted firepower. He would carry a rifle and, when training, received two hours of rifle or sword practice a day.

Nery

Maurice first saw action on 23 August in the first battle of the war, the retreat from Mons. They retreated to the village of Nery in Picardy, France situated in a north south valley around a small river. On 31 August, the 5th Dragoons with their horses were billeted at the northern edge of the village. The cavalry were prepared to move at 4.30 am on 1 September but decided to wait for the dense fog to clear. Maurice watered his horse ate breakfast and waited. At 5.25 am a patrol were surprised when they met a strong force of enemy cavalry and reported back. The commander of the 5th Dragoons refused to believe

that an attack was imminent and the Germans attacked at 5.40 am with heavy shell and machine gun fire from the heights overlooking the village.

Maurice's story reads like a film script.

At 6am, two squadrons of Dragoons were sent north to try to outflank the Germans. During this action Maurice's commanding officer Lt Colonel George Ansell was mortally wounded and many of his men were lost to machine gun fire. One report said that Maurice was hit by a bullet in the head when retiring but he may have received more wounds than that. He was left for dead on the battlefield.

But by the end of the day, the action of the cavalry prevented the German attack on Nery developing. Later three VCs were awarded. There were high losses of German cavalry and 12 German guns were captured. One of the field guns is now in the Imperial War Museum in London. The British lost 400 horses.

Sergeant Mc Loughlin of the 5th Dragoons asked his troop officer if he might call for volunteers to go and pick up the body of Maurice. They did so and carried him to a farm and left him with a young Frenchwoman, who hid him in her parents' house when the Germans attacked again. It was intended to give him a proper funeral but there were many bodies.

After four days, a doctor found that Maurice's pulse was beating put him to bed and dressed his wounds. He was carefully nursed by a priest, a nun and the village dressmaker.

Maurice was revealed to French troops when they reoccupied the area. But they had no idea, who he was as his aluminium identity disc was missing. The disc had his name, service number, regiment and religion stamped on it and it was usual practise in the British army when dealing with bodies to remove the disc and, with any personal effects, return them to his next of kin. After 17 days, Maurice regained consciousness but had lost his memory.

Five months later on 21 February 1915, four local Nery people received the Maltese Cross from Edward, Prince of Wales (the future King Edward V111). Edward had joined the Grenadier Guards the previous year but was not allowed to see active service. The medals were in recognition of their work in looking after injured soldiers. They were **Dr Lagelouze, Sister Benoit, Abbe**

Bezard and Miss Juliette Caron. They also worked at the Chateau de la douje, then used as a hospital. It is very likely that these were the people who tended Maurice. The village dressmaker was **Mme Boucheraux**, who lived very close to the 5th Dragoon's billets. (Was she of insufficient status to be awarded a medal?)

Meanwhile, back home Maurice was reported missing in action. The distraught Hill family held two memorial services. Almost certainly in St Michaels Church, Compton Martin and St Marys, Chipping Sodbury.

In France, someone, probably a British officer, looked at Maurice's boots and recognised that they were made by Peals, a long-established bespoke boot and shoe makers in Grosvenor Square, London. They made expensive shoes for the rich, film stars, royalty and politicians. Outline feet drawings of every customer were made and personal identification numbers stamped on the boots. Peals were contacted and Maurice was identified by his personal number.

On 27 September, his delighted family, joined Maurice at the village of Bethisy Sainte Pierre, Oise, France and took him to the Hotel Astoria Hospital in Paris, where he had a successful operation on 8 October. He was then taken to London by his family to the exclusive Princess Henry Battenburg Home at 30, Hill Street, Berkeley Square, London. This newly-opened convalescent home had just 16 beds for officers. On 4 November (more than two months after the battle) he was brought home to Hazel Manor. Maurice recovered slowly but had relapses.

In the Bath and Bristol papers there were many "Back from the Dead" and "Reclaimed from the Jaws of death" type newspaper headlines. Good news stories were hard to come by at this time. On one occasion his gamekeeper, Mr Pritchard from Hazel Manor accompanied him to Scotland for convalescence. Unable to hunt throughout the 1920s, Maurice still loved his horses and attended the Bath Horse Show where brother Charles was on the Show Committee. In 1921, Maurice received a red ribbon prize for Sybil his chestnut mare "with a dainty foal at foot".

Mary had waited patiently when Maurice was recovering. But she had to wait seven more years to get married. Maurice's injuries prevented him from going to church. It has been impossible to find out the full extent of these injuries

but it is likely he had mental health and memory problems and had a series of operations. Before he joined up himself in June 1915 almost certainly Dr Bernard Gough , popular district medical officer from West End House, Compton Martin attended him.

Married

Mary, the attractive niece of the Duchess of Hamilton, was determined they would be married. She went to London to obtain a special licence from the Archbishop of Canterbury to be married at her unconsecrated home. "She filled the documents in such a business-like manner that the licence was quickly granted"

Mary and Maurice were engaged in August 1921 and married on 9 November in a well- publicised society wedding held in the gold and white drawing room of Sir Harold and Lady Pelly's house at Thorngrove, Gillingham, Dorset. The house was set in beautiful grounds. Puzzled reporters said : " he was unable to face a public ordeal of a church wedding owing to the delicate health of the bridegroom," "owing to the possibility of severe wounds affecting him in church" and "not sufficiently recovered to stand the strain and excitement."

On the wedding day at Thorngrove an altar was set up with a crucifix and hangings borrowed from St Georges Church, Gillingham and a tall candle and masses of white chrysanthemums were a feature of "the large sunlit drawing room. "Windows of the house were screened off from public view" yet villagers had constructed a laurel flagged archway. A policeman was on guard.

Youngest daughter Mary, "tall and beautiful" wore a simple white chiffon velvet dress with Brussels lace trimmings. There were no bridesmaids, which is a shame as Mary had been a bridesmaid herself at least six times including at her sister's wedding. She knew Maurice would not have been able to cope and only a handful of friends attended. Reverend Lambrook from Blagdon Church and Pretender at Bristol Cathedral with Canon Abbot, from St Georges, Gillingham conducted the ceremony and at the end of the service Mrs Samway, the village organist played The Wedding March on the piano. Captain Codrington , from the 5th Hussars, was best man. Girls Guides and Brownies from Mary's local group formed a guard of honour. The bride and groom were

showered with petals made by disabled soldiers from 55, Bryanston Street, London. Staff from Hazel Manor and Calverton Manor sent presents as did captains and crew from the Hills' Bristol City Shipping Line. Maurice was able to walk to the wedding car but he was wearing a coat with a fur collar to protect his neck. They honeymooned at Studland/Swanage.

It is hard to imagine today but the front page of the Daily Mirror had a large photograph of the unsmiling couple on both 10 November and 11 November 1921. Sir Harold Pelly must have had some influence with the paper's owner Harold Harmsworth! There was no mention in the caption of what Maurice had gone through in the war and the pictures did not seem to show any facial wound scars, yet one press cutting called Maurice "the war- scarred Bristolian".

Maurice and Mary must have had a special affection for Hazel Manor and for a short time lived there. Maurice put their part of Claverton Manor, Bath up for auction in January 1922 and then in January 1924 similarly the 7,572 acre Hazel Manor estate, with its nine farms, houses, woodland, quarry, agricultural buildings and cottages was passed to brother Charles.

They moved house a great deal including to a cottage at Dyrham, near Bath (closer to the Beaufort Hunt?) to Lychett Hard, Upton, Dorset, Old Kenton Lane, Kingsbury, Wickwar, Gloucestershire and Winterton Lodge, Waltham Cross, Essex where they took a very active part in the Holy Innocents Church at High Beech, Epping.

They had a son David Maurice born on 19 August 1922 at Hazel Manor.

Aged 41, Maurice died of pneumonia on 2 February 1934 at Edmonton, London leaving £15,237 gross. For 20 years he had suffered from his injuries. Flags were flown at half-mast. Maurice's headmaster from Chipping Sodbury School and some of his Dragoons including Captain Ansell and Sargent Major Gregory, his drill sergeant came to the funeral. There were no flowers but donations were sent to Guys Hospital, where Maurice presumably had received treatment and to the Ex- Serviceman's Welfare Society. Father Charles Hill was too ill to attend and died himself seven months later. He had been living with his son Charles at Harptree Court, East Harptree.

Did Maurice ever go back and thank the people of Nery for saving his life? The answer is almost certainly yes. In 1967 in a talk at the Royal Artillery Historical Society, Major General H. C. Phillips said: "You told us about Maurice Hill, I

stayed recently in a house in Nery where I was told that an officer from the battle remained until he was well. He even brought his wife out. But unfortunately there is no record of his name. "Lord Norrie replied "It could easily have been Hill. Unfortunately he died some years ago." If he did return, wealthy Maurice must have rewarded those people from the village who saved his life.

Maurice was buried at St Marys Church, Chipping Sodbury/ Yate, the first church he attended as a boy. This must have been his wish. The simple Commonwealth War Graves headstone (369) is north west in the churchyard. It bears the insignia of of the 5th Dragoon Guards and the Latin inscription "Vestia Nulla Retrosum." No Retreat. The carved insignia appropriately includes a horse. Mary died on 9 December 1989, 55 years after Maurice and was buried with him sharing a single headstone. Every day a large number of people use the churchyard as a footpath and pass alongside the gravestone.

Maurice's story is not unusual. In September 1914, Edward Wilkins of the Somerset Light Infantry was reported dead. Then a week later he was reported alive but with a head wound from shrapnel. He had been left for dead in the muddy water of the battlefield until a stretcher bearer saw bubbles in the water and realised he was still breathing. However, he later suffered from headaches, vertigo and other pains.

36 Compton Martin men served in World War One 10 did not come back. They were :

Dr Bernard Bradly Gough West End House, the Street

Now the home of Annie and Billy Headon and their children.

Popular District Medical Officer for many Chew Valley villages. Took on unpopular Poor Law work and had responsibility for the sick in the Temple Cloud Workhouse.

School governor and wrote a paper on the Natural History of Compton Martin

Joined Royal Army Medical Corps and became Lieutenant and Regimental Medical Officer to the South Staffordshire Regiment, died 17 February 1916 aged 41 in a trench tending the wounded. Direct hit all ten died. Found with dressing in one hand and scissors in the other. Husband of Annie, Commandant of Gournay Court VAD Convalescent Hospital, West Harptree. Now owned by MP Rees Moggs.

Private George Henry Bath Military Medal

Citation for medal destroyed in WW2

1st Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment died 24 August 1918 aged 22, 48 days before the war ended. Lived in The Street, CM Service No 13920 Memorial: Vis-en Artois , Panel 4

Corporal William Lawrence Cattell 73rd Brigade,
Royal Field Artillery aged 23 died 27 August 1916 Boulogne
Eastern Cemetery V3 B163. Service No 18436

Eldest son of William and Maria Cattell of Fernhill Farm
William was head gamekeeper and farm bailiff at Hazel
Manor.

Private Joseph Flower born 6 April 1883

aged 35 died 17 May 1918 Son of Joseph and Sarah Ann
Flower, The Coombe. Joseph was the village newsagent.

Royal Fusiliers, 34th Battalion transferred to 101st Labour
Company

Memorial at St Sever Cemetery Extn Rouen, France Q11
Service no 31152 Commonwealth War Graves personal
inscription: "Thy will be done"

Private Albert Edwin Lovell Hampshire Regiment died
1 July 1916 Aged 25 Thiepou Memorial 14a and 14b

Service No 12/1207. Born East Harptree.

Private George Pearce 1st Dorsetshire Regiment
born 1886 Died 13 October 1914 Aged 28

Memorial: Le Touret Panel 22 and 23 Service No
7296

Wilfred George Stevens, aged 20, Royal Horse Field Artillery died 23 June 1916 Memorial: Sucrierie Cemetery, Panel I H 47 Service no 69563

Son of Mr G Stevens, The Wrangle

House now gone but was at the bottom of track leading to the Paynes' houses.

Private Wesley G Tossell Military Medal,

1st Gloucestershire Regiment died 24 September 1918 aged 22 service no 22496 47 days before War ended

Farm labourer, son of Geoffrey and Hannah Tossell of The Combe. Regiment went straight to the Front and stayed there until the end of the War. Three Tossell children, also from the Coombe, were killed by a bomb in WW2.

Private George Francis Webb son of Charles and Emily Webb, Rectory Lane then called Yeovis Lane (presumably Yeovista) Born 1889 service number 26549 Quarryman aged 28 died 13 Sept 1916 1st Battalion Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry. Born Mountain Ash

Private Henry Alfred Webb born 8 December 1892
Royal Engineers, Pioneer 21st Division Signals Company died
28 March 1918 Age 23

Husband of Winifred Webb, Tonyrefail, Glamorgan. Father
William, Mother Mary Pozieres Memorial Panel 10 to 13

Lieutenant Richard Alexander Gathorne Hill ,
Somerset Light Infantry, Royal Navy Air Service and Royal Air
Force Aged 21 died 12 August 1918 Shot down near Ostend
piloting a Sopworth Camel. Plane or body never found. Son
of Charles and Gertrude Hill, Hazel Manor. A painting of him
is in Village Hall, originally called the Memorial Hall.

Plus one

George Henry Oake, Canadian born in Compton
Martin

Age 25 in 1918 Farm worker 1st Depot Battalion,
Saskatchewan.